The Department of History and Philosophy of Medicine
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ON THE CORONAVIRUS

The Department of History and Philosophy of Medicine is up and running under deeply changed conditions. In the last few days we have provided an online researcher with references about Kansas’s Camp Funston in 1918; we hosted a virtual ceremony for the new Armstrong Medical Humanities Award; and created two new final sessions on pandemic ethics for our required third-year course. Much has changed. Much remains to be done. But here I want to pause briefly to share some thoughts about the pandemic.

As the news on the coronavirus grows more threatening, it leaves us searching for perspective. The reigning metaphor of the moment is war. Politicians and public officials remind us daily that we are at war with a new enemy, the virus. It is a worthy comparison. War can bring people together in a crisis, to join in a common cause. And as the US struggles to free itself from the second of two seemingly endless wars, it is easy to see why the comparison comes to hand.

But while we cannot choose our pandemics, we can choose our metaphors, and wars have losers as well as winners. I would like to suggest a different perspective. We have now become the most recent species on earth to face radical population pressures. It is not a happy comparison, but many creatures face challenges that are far greater than COVID-19. Even the direst predictions for the virus leave humans unchanged as the dominant species on earth. Indeed, the species most similar to us are now largely extinct – or bred principally as food or pets. I do not make this comparison in anger, to lay blame or argue for easy moral equivalences. Rather, I believe it offers insight at a crucial time, reminding us of our weighty dependence and interconnectedness with the global biome and environment.

There is a tendency to think about the decimation of species in terms of human needs and desires. It is true that we manage large sectors of the biome – breeding, cultivating, harvesting, and culling at will. But the virus reminds us that the power we wield makes changes we neither infallibly predict nor fully control. We may wonder if the great whales will recover, once we have stopped killing them. Perhaps we can engineer the return of the buffalo. But even the species we ignore do not always escape. It is not our appetite for songbirds or salamanders that leads to their decline. We all swim in this same great ocean. And it is a complex and unpredictable place. Global climate change is simply a handy term for a snarl of vast, human-triggered changes that is unlikely to yield to simple solutions.

What is the response? We can look back at the things that saved us before as a species. Not so long ago we huddled together at night under woven branches as the cold rain drove in and wolves moved silently through the brush. We should do now what we have always done. We will devise clever tools and plot new strategies to survive. We already know how to protect and care for each other, how to hunker down and conserve precious resources, and how to dream about that moment when the sun will break through again to show us the world, much changed – but glistening, washed clean, and still teeming with life.

Chris Crenner, MD, PhD
Professor and Chair
Ralph Hermon Major Luncheon Seminar Series

In the wake of COVID-19’s ongoing scourge, we are disappointed to postpone the final installments of this year’s series. Nevertheless, we look forward to adding these speakers to an exciting array of talks during 2020-21. Cancelations notwithstanding, the year brought several highlights. We began with Dr. Seth Jacob who expanded upon a colorful nineteenth-century controversy regarding chloroform administration. In November, Dr. Stuart Munro led an edifying discussion of Hemingway’s short story “Indian Camp.” He elucidated its value for current clinical practice. In January, Dr. Tony Kovac returned to present some of his recent research on Orval Cunningham and his hyperbaric tanks. Also, in January, we welcomed Dr. Charis Boke. Dr. Boke was a recipient of the Pearce Fellowship, which offers support to conduct research in the library and archival collections. Her talk addressed the changing and contested concept of poison during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially the contribution of herbalists to those debates. Finally, Dr. Bill Everett surveyed the depiction of doctors in opera since the eighteenth century. He provided brief, but trenchant interpretations of three twentieth-century operas. These operas reveal to varying degrees the physician as either empathetic healer or detached technician.

Ryan R. Fagan, PhD
Research Assistant Professor

Department Accolades

Professor and Chair Chris Crenner is the National Library of Medicine 2020 Michael E. DeBakey Fellow in the History of Medicine. Dr. Crenner’s research project focuses on the surgical history of ulcers.

Clinical Professor Tarris Rosell was named the Center for Practical Bioethics’ Vision to Action Honoree.

Research Associate Professor Arthur Daemmrich, also the Director of the Smithsonian Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation, is working on two writing projects in the history of medicine. The first is a book chapter about the intertwined histories of the American (and global) pharmaceutical industry and the Food and Drug Administration over the past 100 years, arguing that regulation very fundamentally shaped the organization and competitive standing of firms. The second is a research project about animal and clinical testing of sedatives in the 1950s, especially exploring the challenges of identifying good animal models for how humans react to sedatives and analyzing how physicians gathered data about human responses in the absence of objective outcome measures.

Museum Curator and Assistant Librarian Jamie Rees was elected secretary to LAMPHHS - Librarians, Archivists and Museum Professionals in the History of the Health Sciences (formerly known as ALHHS - Archivists and Librarians in the History of the Health Sciences).

Graduating medical student Logan Haug is the recipient of this year’s Dr. and Mrs. Don Carlos Guffey Award for exemplary scholarship in the History of Medicine.
Third-year medical student **Isaac Baldwin** received the inaugural Armstrong Award for Humanity in Medicine. Dr. John Armstrong (M ‘66) established the **Lois Margaret French (N ’60) and John David Armstrong, II Humanities in Medicine Award** in 2019 to recognize a third-year medical student at the University of Kansas School of Medicine who has demonstrated outstanding commitment to the humanities and ethics as an integral part of their training and a desire to pursue the humanities in medicine during their clinical experiences.

**LIBRARY NOTES**

During this time of uncertainty due to COVID-19, we at the Clendening Library & Museum and the KUMC Archives have had to be creative while social distancing and working from home. As a precaution, we have postponed all events, including student presentations, tours, and lectures held in the Clendening Foyer through April 30, 2020. We understand that scheduling events is a moving target and we will revise as we go along. Despite the challenges we face, we are still focused on assisting our researchers as best we can through email, and we check our office phones regularly.

The Clendening Library & Museum postponed our celebrations of the bicentennial of Florence Nightingale’s birth. Included in our homage was a History of Medicine lecture on Nightingale and a Library & Museum exhibit opening and reception. Our speaker, Dr. Sioban Nelson, University of Toronto, had to defer because of travel restrictions. She had also graciously agreed to present a lecture to the second-year nursing students, so we were doubly disappointed. 2020 is designated the World Health Organization’s International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife, so we will be able to celebrate the whole year – and this celebration has never been more deserved!

Another “tabled” event was an historical display for the University **One Book** guest lecturers, authors of **The Perfect Predator**, Dr. Steffanie Strathdee and Dr. Thomas Patterson. This riveting medical mystery recounts how Dr. Strathdee used historical research to find the cure for her husband’s virus. The Clendening holds many of the primary sources consulted in the book, including Snow, d’Herelle, l’Institute Pasteur, Fleming. The authors’ online presentation will be as huge a success as the book has been and I now have an additional library table display!

Lastly, St. Louis conservator Noah Smutz recently evaluated several library items for conservation. However, just as the evaluation and paperwork was being completed, we had to postpone the process until travel and personal contacts resume. Can’t wait! Stay healthy.

Dawn McInnis, BS
Rare Book Librarian

*Dawn working from home – finally able to eat at her desk!!*(Photo & home IT support: A. Marvin McInnis, Jr.)
Anyone who has had the chance to visit the Clendening Foyer since January may have noticed the appearance of a “new” piece of furniture – an invalid chair. This early wheelchair, donated by the family of Janet Carrigan, dated back to the family homestead in Wakeman, Ohio. Janet’s son remembers his great-grandfather sitting in it when he last saw him in 1959 or so. It was moved to his mother’s home in Lee’s Summit, Missouri, in the 1990s, where it stayed in the garage for the next three decades. Janet passed away in the summer of 2019, and the chair came to the Clendening Museum in January.

This chair was sold as the “Invalid Chair No. 24,” manufactured by the New Haven Folding Chair Co. in New Haven, Connecticut. The maker’s mark attached to the back of the chair dates it to between 1878 and 1897. Features of the chair were patented by the company’s founders in 1878. The exact model was featured in their 1879 catalog, appearing again in the 1890 catalog. This chair has hand rims on the wheels, making it more desirable than other models produced by the company. This chair appears to be made of oak, featuring a spring cushion upholstered in red velvet and a footrest upholstered in burlap tapestry. These details suggest a manufacture date closer to 1890 than 1878. This artifact is in singularly good condition for its age. A quick web search reveals that there are a fair number of New Haven Folding Chair Co. chairs in existence (including a few wicker wheelchairs), but few examples of the Invalid Chair no. 24 with hand rims or surviving upholstery. It is truly a fine example of a post-Civil War wheelchair.

Jamie Rees, MA
Museum Curator and Assistant Librarian
Over the last few months the KUMC Archives have received several new donations to the collections. Of interest is a donation made by Joe Vaughn, Jr., who recently contributed papers from his grandfather, Dr. Hugh Wilkinson. Dr. Wilkinson was an early faculty member of the KU School of Medicine and served with the Medical Corps during World War I. Wilkinson’s collection contains assorted materials from his military service and ephemera from his Kansas City, Kansas, practice.

Hugh Wilkinson was born on November 27, 1877, in Seneca, Kansas, to Western and Mary Frances (McLellan) Wilkerson. He received his M.D. from Rush Medical College in 1901 and relocated to Kansas City, where he served as chair of surgery in the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Kansas City, Kansas. In 1905, he joined the teaching faculty of the University of Kansas School of Medicine after the College merged with the newly formed medical school. In 1915, Wilkerson joined the Medical Reserve Corps as a surgeon and eventually rose to the rank of major and commanding officer of mobile hospital No. 103 in France. He was a member of the staff of surgeons at several Kansas City area hospitals, including Bethany, St. Margaret’s, and Providence. Wilkinson died on August 14, 1934.

Please contact Alex Welborn with questions about the Hugh Wilkinson collection housed in the KUMC Archives.

Alex Welborn, MLIS
Head Archivist

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FRIENDS OF THE CLENDENING

We welcome contributions that support the broad mission of the Department of History and Philosophy of Medicine and the legacy of Logan Clendening. Private support makes a great difference to the department.

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